

10-Year Downtown Revitalization Strategy

Phase 2 Draft Report

City of Hamilton

November 10th, 2025



Cultural Spaces
People and Places

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Introduction

Hamilton has always been a city built on hard work, resilience, and quiet determination. Forged in its industrial roots, it is a city that knows how to build, repair, and reinvent, not through pretension, but through perseverance. Its people have weathered change and challenge with a steady focus on possibility, turning setbacks into momentum and effort into progress. This character runs through the city's streets and skyline: in the repurposed factories now alive with artists and entrepreneurs, in the cranes that mark new growth, and in the deep pride Hamiltonians take in their community. Hamilton's strength has never been about show; it has always been about substance, the conviction that the city's best days are still ahead, built by the same hands that shaped its past.

At the heart of that spirit are Hamiltonians themselves: resilient, caring, and deeply connected to one another. Through every challenge, from economic shifts to social pressures, the people of this city have responded with compassion and determination. They have built networks of mutual support, led grassroots revitalization efforts, and shown that care for community is one of Hamilton's defining strengths. This reputation for empathy and perseverance continues to attract people who want to make a difference, people who see Hamilton not as a finished product, but as a shared project.

Before the pandemic, Downtown Hamilton was on a clear upward trajectory. New businesses were opening, cultural venues were flourishing, and long-vacant buildings were coming back to life. The energy was palpable: people were choosing to live, work, and invest Downtown. Yet the pandemic disrupted that momentum, exposing vulnerabilities that had long existed beneath the surface. Today, downtown faces serious challenges: empty storefronts, safety concerns, social pressures, and shifting work patterns that have reduced daily foot traffic. In many ways, the downtown is in crisis. But this moment also presents an opportunity; to rethink how the city, its partners, and its people can come together to restore confidence and vitality in the core.

The desire to rebuild and care for Downtown remains strong. Business owners, property developers, cultural organizations, residents, and community advocates are ready to act but they cannot do it alone. They need a City that is a true partner: one that listens, collaborates, and removes barriers to good ideas. Revitalization requires coordination, shared responsibility, and trust. The City must work hand in hand with all those who are willing to invest in, care for, and champion Downtown aligning resources, policies, and creativity to spark renewal that is inclusive, lasting, and visible in every block.

This report does not claim to offer a silver bullet or a single, definitive solution. Downtown revitalization is complex, dynamic, and deeply human work. Instead, this strategy lays out a "path forward", a framework for action, learning, and collaboration. It invites decision-makers, business owners, community partners, and residents to focus on outcomes rather than perfection, to test ideas, measure impact, and adjust along the way. Progress will come not from avoiding risk but from the courage to experiment, to try new approaches, and to learn together. By embracing this mindset, Hamilton can continue to evolve, resilient, compassionate, and confident in its ability to shape its own future.

1. Why we are revitalizing Downtown

1.1. What is a Downtown?

Downtowns emerged historically as the geographic and functional cores of urban life. They were compact areas where commerce, governance, transportation, and culture intersected. They were designed for proximity and exchange, concentrating banks, department stores, theatres, and civic buildings within walkable distances. This concentration gave downtowns a symbolic role as the “front door” of the city, the place that represented its economic strength, civic pride, and collective identity.

By the mid-20th century, downtowns had evolved into concentrated centres of administration, finance, and professional services, structured around the conventional 9-to-5 workday. They also accommodated a growing concentration of cultural and entertainment assets, including museums, art galleries, theatres, arenas, restaurants, and bars, that extended activity into the evening and supported regional tourism and leisure economies. The urban form of these downtowns was increasingly shaped by automobile dependency: roadway networks were designed for high-capacity movement, parking supply became a central planning consideration, and land-use patterns adapted to facilitate vehicle access. This functional model produced a distinct temporal pattern of high daytime activity associated with office employment, complemented by evening and weekend visitation linked to events and entertainment, but limited continuous residential presence or around-the-clock use.

In recent decades, downtowns have been redefined as multi-functional urban ecosystems that combine employment, culture, education, residential life, and social services within a dense, walkable environment. This reconceptualization has guided planning policy and investment, seeking to create downtowns that are active throughout the day and inclusive of diverse users. However, this vision is now under pressure. Structural shifts, such as hybrid work models, e-commerce, and the visible concentration of social and housing challenges in central areas, have disrupted established assumptions about how downtowns operate and what roles they should play in urban life. The result is an ongoing transition, in which cities must reassess how to sustain vibrancy and economic relevance amid changing patterns of use.

The vitality of downtowns is closely tied to perceptions of safety, cleanliness, and opportunity. Post-pandemic shifts have challenged these conditions: hybrid work has reduced daily office populations, retail patterns have changed, and social pressures have become more visible in central urban spaces. As a result, many downtowns now face a transition period and are no longer defined solely by traditional economic activity, but by their ability to adapt and diversify.

Resilient downtowns are those that have embraced flexibility and innovation. They invest in housing to broaden their population base, support small and creative businesses to sustain local character, and enhance public spaces to foster inclusion and belonging. Increasingly, revitalization strategies emphasize collaboration, bringing together municipalities, property owners, community organizations, and residents to align investments and coordinate outcomes. The downtown becomes not just a business district, but a platform for civic partnership and experimentation.

Downtowns remain the last truly shared civic spaces. They are physical environments where people from all walks of life can encounter one another in meaningful, spontaneous ways. They are the social commons of urban life, where difference, creativity, and commerce intersect in tangible form. Yet the context around them is shifting again. The emerging industrial revolutions in automation, artificial intelligence, green energy, and digital connectivity, are transforming how cities create and distribute value. As production becomes more decentralized and knowledge work more virtual, downtowns must redefine their function. Their future relevance will lie not only in economic output but in their capacity to cultivate human connection, creativity, and collaboration, qualities that cannot be automated or digitized. Reimagined downtowns can serve as the physical and social infrastructure of the next economy: places that bring people together to innovate, deliberate, and build shared prosperity in an increasingly complex world.

1.2.Downtown yesterday and today

Hamilton emerged in the early nineteenth century as a centre of manufacturing and administration, rooted between the Niagara Escarpment and Lake Ontario. Its rapid industrialization in the mid-1800s, driven by the railways and British immigration, gave rise to a dense commercial and working-class core. By the early twentieth century, Hamilton's factories supplied textiles, steel, and metal goods nationwide, while its Downtown supported a vibrant mix of retail hubs, civic institutions, and residential neighbourhoods. It was particularly strategic during the World Wars, with many weapons and goods being produced in the city's local industries.

However, the city's heavy reliance on manufacturing, especially steel, meant that it was especially vulnerable to the shifting global markets, and as the reliance on steel and manufacturing decreased, the city experienced a period of decline. After the 1950s, suburban expansion drew residents away from the urban centre, and the closure of textile mills and light-manufacturing plants reduced downtown employment. This economic slump, coupled with the loss of residential populations and a consistent workforce, as well as aging infrastructure, marked the beginning of a long cycle of decline.

Following the World Wars, leaders at the City of Hamilton attempted to respond to the deterioration of downtown areas with mid-century urban-renewal strategies rooted in modernist planning principles. From the 1950s through the 1980s, Hamilton sought to rebuild the city centre into a cultural and economic hub. Efforts included the widening of King Street, the creation of a one-way street grid to manage congestion, and the clearance of older houses and buildings to make way for large civic and commercial projects.

In 1959, the city focused on redevelopment and renewal of a central downtown area with changes to City Hall and the Court House. The construction of Jackson Square in the 1970s was a keystone in the urban renewal project for Hamilton, with the creation of a mixed-use project retail mall. Further developments around Jackson Square and along main transport corridors like King, James, and Bay Streets included notable areas like Hamilton Place (built in 1973 as a multi-purpose arts centre), the Hamilton Art Gallery (1977), and the Copps Coliseum (opened in 1985 as a large-scale sports arena). Green spaces in the city core were also modified, with Gore Park dramatically altered in 1983 with the removal of all original trees from the area to make space for a new type of urban park. Transportation hubs, like the Rebecca Street bus terminal, were demolished and replaced by new centres in an attempt to improve access and alternative transport systems.

These projects embodied this redevelopment approach, with the intent to replace aging structures with cultural and commercial spaces which would draw people, encourage new investments, and restore civic pride. However, the large-scale changes and interventions succeeded mainly in demolishing entire blocks of historic buildings, displacing small businesses and erasing much of the local built urban fabric. The physical transformation was dramatic, but the hoped-for social and economic goals fell short, as the new monumental changes did not encourage residential growth or visitor interest in the downtown core as anticipated.

By the 1990s, the issues from Hamilton's earlier renewal projects became more apparent as downtown continued to decline. Despite numerous projects and initiatives focused on revitalization attempts and investment, vacancy rates remained high and an ongoing lack of activity. Several local initiatives were instigated, such as the Downtown Hamilton Ideas Charrette (1996), Restore the Core (1997), and Core Heritage 2000, which revealed a growing desire for change. Residents and workers cited outdated infrastructure, parking challenges, high taxes, and a lack of coordinated planning, all of which had caused ongoing problems for a lively and engaging downtown.

Failure for these projects partly stemmed from the gap between planning intent and implementation. Projects were often designed separately, with limited integration between economic, social, and cultural goals. The emphasis on commercial and industrial redevelopment removed Hamilton's downtown role as a residential and cultural centre. Moreover, as the steel industry declined through the 1980s–2000s,

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Hamilton lost major employers, and with them, the stable working population that once sustained local businesses.

Before the pandemic, Downtown Hamilton was showing steady signs of economic recovery and renewal, supported by employment growth, decreasing office vacancies, and an increasingly vibrant street-level economy. According to the City's 2019 *Downtown Office Vacancy and Employment Survey (PED20006)*, the Downtown Urban Growth Centre (UGC), bound by Queen Street, Victoria Avenue, Hunter Street, and Cannon Street, contained 26,305 jobs, marking a modest 0.7% increase (186 jobs) over the previous year. The density of jobs and residents reached 209 persons and jobs per hectare (pjh), reflecting progress toward Hamilton's official plan target of 250 pjh by 2031. Most jobs were full-time (68.9%), followed by part-time (23.6%) and seasonal (7.5%), indicating a stable employment base in the city's core.

The office market in late 2019 was in its strongest position in nearly a decade. The survey recorded 5.6 million sq. ft. of office space in the Downtown, of which 667,720 sq. ft. was vacant, an 11.9% vacancy rate, down 0.8 percentage points from 2018. This was the first time since 2011 that the vacancy rate fell below 12%, signalling improving economic conditions and renewed investor confidence. Most of the empty space was concentrated in a few large office towers, meaning smaller buildings and mixed-use properties were performing far better, with a "functional" vacancy closer to 7% if those large towers were excluded.

At street level, Downtown was visibly more active and appealing. The survey found a 9.9% commercial street-front vacancy rate, down from 10.4% in 2018. Some vacancies were temporary, caused by renovations or restorations, suggesting an underlying trend of reinvestment and turnover rather than long-term decline. City staff noted "fewer vacancies across the board," contributing to a more positive and vibrant public realm, with more active storefronts, pedestrian traffic, and signs of small-business confidence.

Taken together, these data show that Downtown Hamilton was on a clear upward trajectory immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Modest but steady job growth, rising employment density, and a tightening commercial real-estate market reflected increasing confidence among employers, investors, and residents. The combination of renewed investment, adaptive reuse, and consistent City monitoring positioned the core as a regional employment and service hub. The 2019 report painted a picture of a Downtown that, while still recovering from decades of economic transition, had entered a period of measurable improvement and cautious optimism, setting the stage for both the challenges and opportunities that would emerge in the years that followed.

Profile of Downtown today

Downtown Hamilton today reflects both the city's enduring strengths and its complex urban challenges. Within the Downtown Urban Growth Centre (UGC), the heart of Hamilton's core, the population is approximately 13,000 residents, while the broader Community Improvement Plan Area (CIPA) supports about 31,000 residents. The area continues to function as the city's economic and institutional core, hosting over 28,000 jobs, a diverse range of businesses, and many of Hamilton's most important civic, cultural, and educational institutions. Despite facing social and economic pressures in recent years, Downtown remains a vital centre of activity, creativity, and identity for the entire city.

The economic footprint of Downtown is significant. The combined assessed property value of the CIPA area is estimated at \$5 billion, while the UGC represents approximately \$3.5 billion. Together, the largest area accounts for roughly 5.1% of Hamilton's total assessment base, which stands at \$93.8 billion in 2025. Within the network of Hamilton's Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), the Downtown Hamilton BIA and the International Village BIA together have an assessed value of about \$288 million, representing approximately 38% of the total assessed value of all BIAs citywide. This concentration of value underscores Downtown's continued fiscal and economic importance to Hamilton, particularly in commercial and mixed-use properties that drive municipal revenues and local employment.

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Demographically, Downtown Hamilton's population skews younger and more diverse than the citywide average. A large proportion of residents are between 25 and 44 years old, reflecting the growing presence of young professionals, students, and newcomers drawn by relative housing affordability and proximity to services, transit, and culture. At the same time, Downtown also includes higher proportions of single-person and lower-income households, as well as residents facing housing precarity. This diversity is one of Downtown's defining features, a blend of creative workers, long-term residents, newcomers, and vulnerable populations sharing the same urban space. The housing landscape is evolving rapidly: hundreds of new residential units were completed or under construction in 2024 and 2025, primarily in mixed-use and mid-rise developments along the LRT corridor and in adaptive reuse projects. These new homes represent early progress toward intensification goals and a partial response to housing demand pressures in the core.

At the same time, social pressures have intensified. The number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Hamilton has risen from approximately 1,200 in 2024 to over 2,000 in 2025, reflecting a deepening housing and affordability crisis. The City and its partners currently operate roughly 600 shelter beds, including emergency, transitional, and low-barrier spaces, which meet only part of the need. Downtown remains the focal point of visible homelessness and social vulnerability in Hamilton, where housing instability intersects with public health, mental health, and addiction challenges. These conditions have heightened community concern and reinforced the need for coordinated, compassionate, and sustained action.

Despite these challenges, Downtown Hamilton continues to demonstrate resilience and potential. The growth in residential population, steady employment base, and enduring concentration of economic and cultural assets provide a foundation for recovery and renewal. The combination of historic architecture, creative entrepreneurship, and new investments in housing and infrastructure position the Downtown to play a leading role in Hamilton's transition toward a more inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous future. Downtown today is therefore a place of contrasts — a core rich in potential but burdened by visible inequities, a centre of economic productivity and civic pride that also bears the weight of the city's most complex social issues. It remains Hamilton's symbolic and functional heart, where the city's economic vitality, creativity, and compassion converge. The path forward will depend on aligning investment, governance, and community partnerships to ensure that this heart continues to beat strongly for all who call Hamilton home.

1.3.Recent and current City initiatives

The City of Hamilton's Cross-Departmental Downtown Revitalization Initiative Update (Report PW25053) provides a comprehensive overview of the City's coordinated efforts to restore vitality, safety, and economic strength to the downtown core. The report emphasizes that a clean, safe, and vibrant downtown is essential to Hamilton's civic identity and economic future. The initiative brings together multiple departments under a unified strategy focused on four key pillars: Beautification & Cleanliness, Tourism, Safety, and Economic Development.

The Beautification & Cleanliness pillar highlights extensive service enhancements implemented since 2023, such as expanding litter collection to seven days a week, increasing street and bike lane sweeping, and launching a summer Downtown Clean Team. These actions are supported by new tools like a centralized graffiti-reporting system and a forthcoming public Graffiti Dashboard to promote transparency and community participation. The City has also stepped up enforcement around vacant and heritage buildings, property standards, and graffiti removal on private property, demonstrating a data-driven, proactive approach to maintenance and enforcement.

Under the Tourism pillar, the City is investing in placemaking, cultural programming, and public art to re-establish downtown as a cultural and entertainment hub. Initiatives include gateway enhancements, Hamilton's "Year of Music" in 2026 timed with the JUNO Awards, and adaptive reuse projects like

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Magnolia Hall. Public art and pedestrianization pilots on key streets are also being introduced to animate downtown and improve its appeal for both residents and visitors.

The Safety pillar outlines a coordinated approach that includes the Encampment Response Team, housing outreach through BIAs, infrastructure repairs, and enhanced road safety measures. The Hamilton Police Service's Core Patrol initiative employs data-driven, community-based policing to target visible disorder and improve perceptions of safety. These efforts are complemented by new safety infrastructure such as lighting upgrades and the Hostile Vehicle Mitigation pilot for large public events.

Finally, the Economic Development pillar tackles structural challenges such as rising office vacancies, hybrid work, and low storefront occupancy. Key programs include the Downtown Office-to-Residential/Hotel Conversion Grant, the permanent Graffiti Grant Program. Continuous engagement with BIAs, local businesses, and property owners remains central to aligning revitalization with investment and growth. The report concludes that sustained cross-departmental coordination is critical to achieving a cleaner, safer, more inclusive, and economically vibrant downtown, one that reflects Hamilton's values of equity, diversity, and accessibility while strengthening civic pride and resilience.

1.4. Downtown matters

Downtown Hamilton is the heart of the city's identity and the centre of its civic, cultural, and economic life. It is the place where Hamilton's history meets its future, where the city's industrial legacy, artistic creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit converge. A strong Downtown signals a strong Hamilton: it represents the city's collective ambition, its confidence, and its capacity to adapt. Downtown is not simply another district; it is a shared civic asset that connects residents from every part of the city. It is where people gather to celebrate, to create, to learn, and to engage, a physical expression of Hamilton's care, diversity, and community resilience.

Downtown is one of Hamilton's most productive and impactful urban areas. It generates a disproportionately high share of employment, investment, and cultural activity relative to its geographic size. Within roughly two square kilometres, Downtown Hamilton accommodates more than 28,000 jobs, 13,000 residents, and a concentration of municipal, health, and educational institutions that serve the entire region. It is home to some of the city's most significant cultural assets, including the Art Gallery of Hamilton, FirstOntario Concert Hall, and the Hamilton Public Library, as well as a growing network of creative industries, restaurants, and small businesses. This density of economic and cultural activity creates powerful multiplier effects: every dollar invested Downtown returns value city-wide through tax revenue, visitor spending, and employment growth.

Downtown also anchors Hamilton's transit, infrastructure, and housing systems. It is the hub of the Light Rail Transit (LRT) corridor, linking east and west Hamilton and connecting future growth nodes. Investments in Downtown infrastructure, from utilities to green stormwater systems, strengthen the city's ability to absorb new residents and businesses without expanding its footprint. As Hamilton grows, the Downtown's capacity for intensification and adaptive reuse will be key to meeting housing targets under both provincial and federal mandates. This makes Downtown renewal not just a local goal, but a strategic necessity for managing growth sustainably.

Equally important are the social and qualitative dimensions. Downtown is where Hamilton's commitment to care, inclusion, and equity is most visible and most tested. It is home to vital social services, affordable housing, and community organizations that support vulnerable populations. When Downtown succeeds, it creates pathways to opportunity for residents across the city; when it struggles, the impacts ripple outward. Investing in safety, housing, and social cohesion Downtown therefore strengthens Hamilton's entire social fabric.

Finally, a thriving Downtown is central to Hamilton's image and competitiveness. It is what visitors experience first, what students and entrepreneurs consider when choosing where to live or work, and

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what investors look to as a measure of civic vitality. Research consistently shows that strong downtowns contribute to higher citywide property values, increased tourism, and greater business confidence. For Hamilton, revitalizing the Downtown is about more than urban renewal; it is about affirming the city's trajectory, attracting the next generation of residents and businesses, and ensuring that prosperity is shared.

2. Designing the strategy

2.1. Engaging Hamiltonians

As directed by Council, the project made a concerted effort to engage Hamiltonians from all walks of life, hearing from hundreds of residents, business owners, creators, service providers, and community partners across the Downtown and beyond. This process captured a meaningful cross-section of perspectives, revealing both the challenges and the aspirations that define Downtown today. While there are still voices yet to be heard, the City and project team remain firmly committed to continuing engagement, ensuring that future phases of the strategy reflect the full diversity and lived experience of Hamilton's community.

The first phase of the Downtown Hamilton Revitalization Strategy placed engagement at the centre of its approach. From the outset, the process was designed to reach a broad and representative cross-section of those who live, work, create, and invest in the Downtown. Beginning in early March 2025, the project team, led by Cultural Spaces in partnership with City staff, developed an engagement structure that could both capture diverse perspectives and allow for open, honest dialogue. The goal was to listen before planning, to understand the lived experience of Downtown from multiple viewpoints, and to establish the foundation for an authentic, shared direction.

Between March and June 2025, engagement unfolded across multiple platforms and settings. Nine thematic conversations were organized around key areas shaping Downtown life: Arts, Culture and Entertainment; Small and Mid-Size Businesses; Transportation and Mobility; Safety and Social Services; Downtown Marketing and Tourism; Housing; Commercial Properties; and the Urban Fabric and Public Realm. Each session brought together an average of fifteen participants, representing local businesses, cultural organizations, social agencies, property owners, and residents. Several of these sessions were co-hosted with external partners, including Business Improvement Areas and established social-service and housing networks. In total, hundreds of stakeholders contributed to this phase, offering a credible cross-section of those most invested in Downtown's future.

Public consultation complemented these thematic discussions and was reported to Council on July 9, 2025. This included a series of open houses, interviews, and pop-up engagements, as well as an immersive field component in which the team conducted four extended visits, ten days in total, walking the streets, visiting local establishments, and conversing informally with residents and business owners. This hands-on approach allowed the team to experience Downtown's rhythms by day and night and to capture perspectives often missed in formal consultations. Feedback from these sessions reflected both pride and frustration: pride in Downtown's creativity, diversity, and entrepreneurial energy, and frustration at perceptions of neglect, safety concerns, and slow municipal responsiveness.

A series of working-group meetings with City departments, senior leadership, and the Hamilton Police Service further deepened the dialogue. These sessions explored internal coordination, data requirements, and the City's role as both regulator and partner in revitalization. Two online engagement tools were also launched: one for City staff to share ideas and align on internal roles, and another for external stakeholders to highlight their own initiatives to make Downtown more welcoming. Together, these digital platforms expanded reach and accessibility, ensuring that participation was not limited to those able to attend in person.

This first phase confirmed that Hamiltonians care deeply about their Downtown and want to be active participants in its renewal. Stakeholders consistently expressed a desire for better communication with the City, clearer priorities, and a sense of shared ownership in the revitalization effort. The engagement findings presented to Council in July 2025 highlight both the strength of local commitment and the urgency for the City to work hand-in-hand with residents, businesses, and institutions to restore confidence and momentum.

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Following the presentation to Council, engagement entered a second phase focused on crafting the vision, principles, transformative ideas and early actions for the strategy. The project team reached out to the original stakeholders and partners to test emerging ideas and refine priorities. These discussions took place through a combination of in-person meetings, virtual meetings, and ongoing online feedback channels hosted on *Engage Hamilton*. The intent was to maintain continuity, strengthen relationships, and ensure that the strategy evolved collaboratively rather than being imposed top-down. This iterative engagement continues to reinforce the shared ownership of Downtown's future and the collective responsibility for implementing meaningful, lasting change.

What we heard

Across all stages of engagement, one message was consistent: people care deeply about Downtown Hamilton. Residents, businesses, artists, community organizations, and service providers spoke with pride, frustration, and hope. They described Downtown as both a neighbourhood and a destination. It is a place that reflects Hamilton's diversity, creativity, and resilience, but also one that faces significant challenges requiring sustained attention and coordinated action.

Stakeholders see Downtown as a living community, not just a commercial centre. It is home to tens of thousands of residents, many of them renters, creators, and small business owners, and the livelihood of hundreds of independent entrepreneurs. People value Downtown's walkability, heritage buildings, and cultural energy, but they also want it to function as a complete neighbourhood with essential amenities such as grocery stores, parks, schools, and accessible services. For many, Downtown's greatest strength is its sense of authenticity and human scale, the feeling that it belongs to everyone.

At the same time, participants voiced strong feelings of neglect and disconnection. Many described frustration with the visible deterioration of the public realm, the concentration of social challenges, and a perception that the City has not consistently prioritized the area. Stakeholders expressed a need for improved communication, clearer decision-making, and greater alignment between civic priorities and community-led efforts. They want a City that listens, responds, and acts, one that matches the care and investment that residents and businesses already demonstrate daily.

Throughout the consultations that followed the July 2025 Council presentation, participants also emphasized a desire for clarity and collaboration in shaping a shared vision. They want a revitalization strategy that is practical, inclusive, and transparent. The strategy must build confidence through visible progress and steady, coordinated effort. Discussions about draft principles revealed a strong preference for a "people-first" approach: maintaining and caring for what exists, encouraging initiative, improving safety and accessibility, and supporting those who contribute to the social and cultural fabric of Downtown.

Finally, there is a clear collective aspiration for Downtown to once again reflect Hamilton's pride and potential. Stakeholders want a Downtown that welcomes everyone, where residents feel safe, where businesses can thrive, and where the City demonstrates leadership through partnership and presence. They recognize that transformation will not happen overnight, but they share a readiness to collaborate, experiment, and take ownership of the process. They also wish to see immediate action on critical matters as collective frustration has reached a peak.

2.2. Methodology

The methodology for the Downtown Hamilton Revitalization Strategy has been guided by a sustainability framework that considers the cultural, economic, social, and environmental dimensions of Downtown life as interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The work recognizes that Downtown is both a reflection of Hamilton as a whole and a vital contributor to its broader prosperity and identity. A strong, inclusive, and resilient Downtown supports the success of the entire city, just as the city's overall health shapes the experience of its core. From this perspective, Downtown is understood not as a separate district but as a

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living expression of Hamilton's collective ambition: a place where investments in culture, infrastructure, and community directly benefit residents citywide. This framework ensures that the strategy integrates people, place, and prosperity in a coherent and balanced way.

This is an mission-oriented strategy that is different from a traditional planning document. It is intended to set a clear course for change by focusing on practical outcomes, measurable progress, and visible results. At its foundation lies the belief that good process is essential to good outcomes. Effective revitalization depends on process that is transparent, well-coordinated, and rooted in shared purpose, one that builds momentum and confidence. A sound process is neither so slow and fragmented that progress stalls, nor so reactive that opportunities are missed or decisions are made without lasting benefit. The direction provided through this strategy is therefore one of balance: deliberate in design, but agile in execution to ensure that the City acts decisively while maintaining the discipline and collaboration required to deliver meaningful, long-term change.

To inform this work, the project team gathered and analyzed a comprehensive set of the most current and credible data available. Quantitative and qualitative information were brought together to describe Downtown's realities from multiple perspectives. Demographic and socioeconomic data were reviewed to understand the people who live Downtown, their changing needs, and how they experience their community. Business and employment data were analyzed to assess the scale, diversity, and resilience of the local economy, alongside property and land-use records that reveal investment patterns and the structure of Downtown's economic base.

In parallel with this local data analysis, the team looked at revitalization initiatives and strategies across Canada. This included examining approaches in Ottawa, Winnipeg, London, Montreal, Calgary, Victoria, Halifax, and Edmonton, cities that, like Hamilton, are addressing similar challenges in their downtowns. The review explored policies and projects related to a breadth of issues including homelessness and supportive housing, adaptive reuse and office-to-residential conversions, activation of entertainment and cultural districts, and the design and management of public spaces. These comparative insights provided valuable context for understanding how other municipalities are balancing economic development, social equity, and public realm renewal in post-pandemic environments.

The analysis of these external examples helped identify transferable practices and innovative models that can inform Hamilton's path forward. While there are a range of ideas and solutions that can be gleaned on the entire scope of Downtown challenges, this analysis focused on a selection of critical solutions relevant to priorities for Hamilton. Lessons were drawn from both successful interventions and ongoing challenges.

The methodology also included a review of data related to safety, mobility, and accessibility, drawing on collaboration with municipal departments, the Hamilton Police Service, and social-sector partners. These datasets, paired with observations from a number of site visits, offered insight into how people move through and experience Downtown, and how perceptions of safety and maintenance align with measurable conditions.

Finally, recognizing that Hamilton's Downtown is as much a cultural hub as it is an economic one, data on arts, cultural activity, and tourism were analyzed to capture the broader creative and experiential economy and understand how Downtown's cultural life drives visitation, identity, and economic impact.

Together, these lines of inquiry have produced an integrated, multi-dimensional understanding of Downtown Hamilton's current reality. The resulting analysis not only identifies challenges but also defines opportunities for immediate, coordinated action.

Strategic Structure

The Downtown Hamilton Revitalization Strategy is organized around a clear and connected structure that moves from vision to implementation. Each level of this structure serves a specific function, and together they provide an organized and flexible framework for coordinated action.

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The **Mission** defines the purpose of the Strategy and is a reminder of why this revitalization work is being done.

The **Vision** expresses the shared aspiration for what Downtown Hamilton should become over the next decade.

The **Principles** establish the values and operating standards that guide decision-making across the Strategy. They are particularly powerful when adopted within the municipal organization to focus attention, align resources, and improve coordination across departments. By providing a consistent framework for evaluating choices and setting priorities, the Principles help ensure that the City's actions are coherent, transparent, and responsive. Beyond City Hall, they serve as a shared reference point for stakeholders, enabling businesses, community organizations, and residents to work toward a common direction grounded in mutual understanding and accountability.

The **Levers** identify the key sectors and assets that have the greatest potential to influence change and generate a lift effect across the Downtown ecosystem. These include areas such as arts and culture, housing and development, small business and entrepreneurship, mobility and public space, and the renewal of civic and cultural infrastructure. When investments are aligned within these interconnected levers, their impacts multiply.

The **Priorities** translate this framework into a focused set of specific activities to be completed within three to five years. They concentrate resources and coordination where immediate results can be achieved and confidence restored, while laying the groundwork for longer-term transformation.

The **Transformative Initiatives** represent high-impact, cross-cutting projects combining these levers to produce visible and lasting results. They are efforts that can redefine how Downtown functions and feels.

As the process to develop the actions is underway and that these will be worked on with stakeholders, this draft instead includes **Action Markers** with their relationship to priorities, levers, and transformation initiative indicated to ensure alignment with the priorities. The next draft will replace these action markers with actions that will operationalize the priorities through clear, implementable steps specifying leadership, partnerships, timelines, and measurable outcomes to ensure accountability and progress.

This structure ensures that the Strategy functions as both a directional framework and an implementation roadmap. It connects long-term ambition to short-term delivery, linking vision and evidence to tangible outcomes. By aligning values, levers, and initiatives within a coherent system, the Strategy provides Hamilton with a unified approach to revitalizing Downtown that recognizes its complexity, harnesses its assets, and directs collective effort towards sustainable citywide benefits.

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3. Foundation for change

3.1. Mission

Reignite Downtown's potential by addressing its decline and transforming it into the authentic, renewed heart of the city.

3.2. Vision

Downtown Hamilton is a **safe, green and welcoming core** where tree-lined streets, lively plazas, exceptional artistic, cultural, food-related and entertainment venues, and shaded transit stops make it easy to walk, roll and linger day and night. **Mixed-income homes**—including a strong share of permanently affordable, especially to support Downtown's work force, and non-profit housing—sit above active, transparent ground floors, bringing **more neighbours onto the sidewalks and eyes onto the street**. Storefronts are full, with a curated mix of local shops, markets and restaurants that spill onto parkettes and promenades, while music, art and festivals animate evenings and weekends. **Streets feel cared for**—well lit, clean and accessible—with ambassadors, outreach teams and businesses working together so everyone feels comfortable and supported. Frequent transit and seamless bike connections knit the district to the wider city, and clear wayfinding celebrates Hamilton's arts, cultural and culinary scene.

The exciting and **creative qualities of Hamiltonians are on full display** to attract visitors from outside the city and contribute to a positive reputation. Downtown is **home to venues, destinations, and businesses that are unique in the city**. The result is a Downtown where Hamiltonians of all ages and incomes choose to live, visit and invest—often, happily and for longer.

3.3. Principles

The following principles, when applied together, help guide decisions for maximum impact in revitalizing Downtown. They are a reminder of 'why we are doing this' as actions and initiatives are proposed and implemented. They help get action underway.

a) Back to the basics

The building blocks of a thriving Downtown, namely the condition of public assets, safety, and cleanliness, are taken care of and prioritized.

This principle focuses the priorities on laying down strong foundations for everything else to be built on. The condition of sidewalks, parks, and other public assets and their ongoing maintenance are key to motivating people to come, to invest, and to get a positive impression of Downtown. Equally important is the feeling of safety which is balanced by urban design, the ongoing visible presence of City authority, enforcement of rules, and inclusive activities and events.

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b) Generate value

Downtown generates social and economic value for Hamilton.

This principle focuses on Downtown having a purpose for its residents and for the city as a whole. Decisions lead to positive social and economic outcomes, including fewer unhoused individuals, accessible services, increased affordable housing, new creative hubs, diverse entertainment destinations, needed community assets, and a favourable business environment.

c) Invest in people

Resources are spent on supporting individuals, businesses, and the community.

This principle focuses on directing resources where they matter most to reinvigorate Downtown which includes supporting initiatives, activities, assets, and programmes that help people develop their full potential with positive ripple effects on Downtown.

d) Drive change

Decisions are made that lead to meaningful and desired change.

This principle emphasizes the commitment to change through leadership. This includes encouraging initiative, looking for authenticity in experiences and assets (i.e. it makes sense for Hamilton and its citizens), and the ability to make difficult, impactful and timely decisions.

e) Make it work

Take action and avoid waiting for the perfect circumstances.

This principle is an invitation to spend more time and resources on action and implementation than on policy design and process. The intent is to focus on impact and outcome so that change can occur. The context of action may not be perfect or ideal but it should not be a reason to stop, to avoid taking initiatives, and to try new things.

f) Be positive

How we communicate about, plan for, and intervene in Downtown reinforces positive change.

This principle requires a sustained and conscious effort to develop a positive narrative around Downtown and the city. This includes aiming for excellence, believing in the city's identity, being assertive with talents and abilities, expecting the best, communicate City and partner successes, embracing change, and demonstrate how things are changing.

g) Fix it

Small and big issues are fixed in a timely manner without waiting for 'the big project that's coming'

This principle leads to action and supports a positive approach to decisions. If something is broken or not working, fix it before it becomes a negative. It encourages organizations and individuals to address the problems or let others who can address them perform. It also stresses the importance of not waiting or

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delaying before taking action, not always waiting for the ‘big project’ to be underway before addressing critical things, like sidewalks, city lights, roads, or graffiti.

h) Work together

A thriving city is the result of a diversity of citizens, organizations, public and private decision-makers working together.

This principle commits to a shared governance model where each of the private, public, individual and stakeholder contributors to a city’s fabric work together around a shared vision and these principles. Each contributes its strengths and leverages the other’s contributions. This includes considering private and public partnerships, measuring the public impact of private investments, and decentralizing action. The city as a whole owns Downtown and celebrates its urban experience.

Principle i) Pride

Expect quality and keep things tidy.

This principle sets the expectation that anything being built, designed, or improved, whether by the private or public sector, should be something that Hamiltonians are proud of. Stepping into Downtown should feel comfortable, clean, and positively stimulating for the senses. It enhances the well-being of its residents. Downtown is where Hamilton welcomes visitors and like a home expecting guests, what can be experienced from the public realm is always clean and maintained.

4. Levers of change

4.1. What is a lever?

Levers are the key sectors, systems, and assets through which the City and its partners can influence the course of Downtown Hamilton's revitalization. They represent the domains of action where focused investment and coordination can produce a lift effect to improve how Downtown looks, feels, and functions. Each lever reflects an essential part of the Downtown ecosystem: Aesthetics and Beautification; Connectivity and Transportation; Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment; Development Environment; Economic Opportunities; Main Streets; Public and Green Spaces and Assets; Public Safety; and Residents, Visitors, and Workers. Together, these areas define the physical, social, and economic foundations of a thriving Downtown and serve as the mechanisms through which meaningful change can occur.

The levers are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Investments in one often strengthen outcomes in others. For example, improving Public and Green Spaces enhances Aesthetics and Beautification, supports Economic Opportunities, and contributes to Public Safety by increasing activity and visibility. Similarly, a strong Development Environment enables new housing and adaptive reuse, while Cultural Assets and Entertainment attract people and investment to support local businesses. By intentionally aligning these levers, rather than approaching them as separate initiatives, the City can create a coordinated, systemic approach to revitalization. This integrated perspective ensures that progress in Downtown Hamilton is not incremental or isolated but cumulative, producing lasting benefits that extend across the entire city.

4.2. Aesthetics and Beautification

Why is this important?

Aesthetics and beautification are powerful levers of revitalization because they shape how people feel about, experience, and value Downtown. The visual quality of streets, buildings, and public spaces communicates confidence and care and it signals that a place matters. Clean, well-maintained, and visually engaging environments attract visitors, invite investment, and encourage people to spend time, not just pass through. In Downtown Hamilton, targeted investments in design, lighting, landscaping, and building façades can transform perceptions, strengthen safety, and enhance the daily experience for residents, workers, and tourists alike. Beautification also fosters civic pride and stewardship: when the environment is attractive and inviting, people are more likely to care for it and participate in its renewal. Beyond appearance, aesthetics are an expression of Hamilton's identity, its creativity, resilience, and industrial character, transforming the Downtown into a visible statement of the city's aspirations and values.

Key figures

To consider: Number of pieces of public art + tended flowerbeds + funding for public space maintenance and enhancement

Impact

Increase in visitors, increase in spending, increase in sense of wellbeing

4.3.Connectivity and transportation

Why is it important?

Connectivity and transportation are the structural backbone of Downtown vitality. A successful Downtown must be easy to reach, safe to move through, and pleasant to explore. Efficient transit systems, walkable streets, and cycling infrastructure connect people to jobs, services, and culture while reducing congestion and emissions. The arrival of the LRT creates an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine Downtown's mobility network, shifting from car-dominated corridors to multi-modal, human-centered streets that encourage economic and social activity. Strengthening east–west and north–south connections will enhance accessibility between neighbourhoods, institutions, and attractions, ensuring that Downtown serves as a true regional hub. Improving connectivity is not only about moving people efficiently, but about linking opportunity, accessibility, and inclusion in the heart of the city.

Key figures

To consider: Number of cars, connectivity hubs, number of dedicated bicycle lanes, kms of sidewalk,

Impact

Increase in visitors, increase in spending, increase in services

4.4.Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment

Why is it important?

Culture and entertainment are the lifeblood of great downtowns. They generate energy, attract people, and define a city's character. Downtown Hamilton is home to many of the city's most important cultural and entertainment institutions and creative enterprises, including galleries, theatres, festivals, live music venues, and the sport stadium. These assets are key to attracting visitors, residents, and talent, and to building a sense of belonging and civic pride. Investing in cultural programming, events, and spaces brings streets to life and supports the creative economy that fuels innovation and growth. Strengthening Hamilton's cultural ecosystem Downtown reinforces its identity as a creative, welcoming, and distinctive city, while supporting tourism, small business, and community cohesion.

Key figures

To consider: Culture GDP, number of tourists annually, number of festivals, number of venues, sizes of venues

Impact

ROI per \$, number of jobs

4.5.Development Environment

Why is it important?

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The development environment determines how easily and effectively revitalization can occur. It includes the policies, approvals, incentives, and partnerships that shape what gets built and how. A streamlined, transparent, and flexible development framework can unlock private investment and accelerate transformation. A supportive development environment ensures that public and private projects contribute to shared goals, creating a balanced mix of housing, employment, culture, and amenities. It also helps reduce risk and uncertainty, attracting the kind of long-term, quality investment that strengthens Downtown's foundation for generations.

Key figures

To consider: Value of incentives, number of permits, value of projects, number of residential units

Impact

ROI per \$, number of jobs

4.6.Economic opportunities

Why is it important?

Downtown is a critical engine of Hamilton's economy, a place where ideas, innovation, and enterprise can converge. Creating the conditions for business growth and workforce development is essential to sustaining momentum. Economic opportunity as a lever focuses on nurturing Hamilton's economic base, from creative industries and health sciences to local retail and hospitality, to ensure that success is inclusive. Supporting entrepreneurship, small business resilience, and workforce attraction will help diversify Downtown's economy and maintain a steady flow of talent and investment. When Downtown's economy thrives, it creates value far beyond its boundaries, generating employment, tax revenue, and confidence in Hamilton's overall competitiveness.

Key figures

To consider: Value of property taxes, number of different businesses, GDP, visitor spending, value of the businesses that have their location Downtown/ top 5 largest employers, number of workers

Impact

ROI per \$, number of jobs

4.7.Main Streets

Why is it important?

Main streets are the public face of Downtown Hamilton, where commerce, culture, and community meet. They are the corridors that shape first impressions and daily experiences, lined with the small businesses and heritage buildings that define Hamilton's character. Strengthening main streets means protecting and enhancing their economic and social roles, particularly during periods of disruption such as LRT construction. Investment in façades, storefront programs, pedestrian environments, and business supports will ensure that main streets remain vibrant and resilient. A strong main street network makes

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Downtown legible, welcoming, and full of life, the kind of place where people choose to spend time, invest, and connect.

Key figures

To consider: Kms of no street contact, number of businesses on key main st, pedestrian network lengths, number of pedestrian streets, plazas

Impact

ROI per \$, number of jobs

4.8. Public and Green Spaces and Assets

Why is it important?

Public and green spaces, together with civic and community assets such as libraries, community centres, and sports facilities, are essential to creating a Downtown that is both livable and memorable. These spaces are where public life unfolds: where people gather, rest, learn, play, and connect. Parks, plazas, recreation facilities, and cultural venues improve health and well-being, foster inclusion, and provide opportunities for creativity and shared experience. Strengthening these assets through investment, renewal, and programming ensures that Downtown Hamilton serves all residents, families, youth, seniors, and visitors alike, and contributes to the uplift effect for other investments in the area. Linking these places through green corridors, pedestrian routes, and active transportation networks can create a cohesive system of civic spaces that amplifies Hamilton's social and environmental resilience. Beautiful, accessible, and well-programmed public and community spaces are a visible sign of collective care and investment, transforming Downtown into a welcoming, dynamic, and inclusive civic heart.

Key figures

To consider: Number of parks, green spaces, plazas, community assets

Impact

Increase sense of well-being, stronger community ties

4.9. Public Safety

Why is it important?

Public safety is the foundation of every thriving Downtown, the condition that makes all other forms of renewal possible. A sense of safety is created not only through enforcement, but through care, presence, and design. Clean, well-lit, and active public spaces, supported by coordinated social services, community outreach, and inclusive programming, help reduce vulnerability and build trust. By integrating public safety with social well-being, urban design, and maintenance, Hamilton can create an environment where people feel comfortable and connected throughout the day and night. A safe Downtown is not only one that prevents harm, it is one that invites participation, fosters dignity, and restores confidence in the heart of the city.

Key figures

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To consider: stats

Impact

Increase sense of well-being and safety, confidence in investments, decrease in violent events

4.10.Residents, Visitors and Workers

Why is it important?

Downtown's vitality depends on the experience of the people who live, work, and visit there every day. A healthy and welcoming core offers a balance of housing, employment, recreation, and community life, supported by a strong network of public amenities such as libraries, cultural venues, community centres, and parks. These assets make Downtown livable and magnetic, ensuring that residents feel rooted, workers feel supported, and visitors feel drawn to return. Strengthening everyday experiences, from walkability and cleanliness to cultural events and public gathering spaces, builds a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Investing in the comfort, accessibility, and inclusion of all users helps Downtown Hamilton function as the civic heart of the city, where economic vitality and community well-being reinforce one another.

Key figures

To consider: Number of residents, number of workers, number of visitors, number of residential units, sq/ft of office space

Impact

Dynamic mixed environment, economic opportunities

5. Priorities

The priorities identified in the Strategy are grounded in a comprehensive understanding of Downtown's specific conditions, its history of renewal efforts, and the many voices that have shaped its present and future. They reflect both analysis and insights gained through extensive engagement with hundreds of residents, business owners, community organizations, and institutional partners. Stakeholders consistently expressed a desire for visible progress, better coordination, and a renewed sense of shared purpose while emphasizing the need for the City to remain open, responsive, and collaborative. These priorities are therefore built on a commitment to listen and act: to transform feedback into direction, and direction into measurable outcomes.

They also acknowledge Downtown's long history of repeated cycles of investment and decline, recognizing that lasting change depends on the City's ability to sustain effort and align its tools over time. The Strategy focuses on activating the levers that drive change, the key sectors and assets such as arts and culture, housing, small business, mobility, and public infrastructure that together generate a positive lift effect when strategically reinforced. Additionally, it is particularly sensitive to target certain segments of the population that can be supported to maintain or establish a relationship with Downtown, particularly youth, the members of the arts and culture community, small and mid-sized businesses, and young entrepreneurs and workers in emerging economic driving industries. Informed by these levers and by the City's capacity to guide and convene, the priorities focus attention where the greatest collective impact can be achieved. They translate vision into near-term, coordinated action, ensuring that progress in Downtown generates confidence and benefit across the entire city.

Each of the priorities carries equal importance. Their implementation will vary in scale and timing. Some will require additional planning, design, or partnership development before they can advance, while others can be implemented quickly to demonstrate visible results and build momentum. The Strategy encourages a balance between careful preparation and agile execution. Innovation should be pursued proactively, with the City and its partners ready to seize opportunities as they arise, testing new approaches, learning from early outcomes, and scaling what works to accelerate Downtown's transformation.

1) Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all

Improving safety and well-being is foundational to Downtown Hamilton's revitalization. This priority focuses on creating an environment where everyone, residents, workers, visitors, and vulnerable populations, feels secure and supported. It builds on partnerships with community agencies, businesses, and law enforcement to address both real and perceived safety issues through coordinated action. Efforts include improving maintenance and cleanliness, expanding outreach and support services, and enhancing public spaces to foster activity and natural surveillance. By combining prevention, care, and design, this priority aims to restore confidence and ensure that Downtown is experienced as a welcoming place for all.

Why is this a priority?

Safety and well-being are fundamental to restoring confidence in Downtown Hamilton as a place to live, work, invest and visit. This priority responds to concerns about public order, cleanliness, and social supports by combining community outreach, design improvements, and coordinated municipal action to make the core feel welcoming and cared for.

Examples of scope of action: Street outreach, visible police presence, public realm maintenance, community activation.

2) Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments

Revitalization requires collective action. This priority emphasizes the alignment of public, private, and institutional investments to generate visible, lasting change. It calls for the City to act as both a leader and convener by coordinating infrastructure upgrades, incentive programs, cultural projects, and

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redevelopment efforts so they reinforce one another. By breaking down silos and sequencing projects strategically, the City and its partners can multiply their impact. The goal is to use every investment, whether in housing, streetscapes, or culture, to leverage others, creating a compounding effect that accelerates Downtown's transformation.

Why is this a priority?

Downtown's challenges cannot be solved by any one actor and success depends on aligning the investments and actions of many. This priority addresses the fragmentation of past efforts by coordinating City, institutional, and private investments to create visible, cumulative impact across the core.

Examples of scope of action: Capital alignment, public realm enhancements, joint planning, investment tracking.

3) *Enabling future opportunities*

Downtown must be ready to seize emerging opportunities and adapt to new economic, technological, and social realities. This priority focuses on creating the conditions for long-term resilience and growth by ensuring flexibility in land use, zoning, underground infrastructure readiness, climate change adaptation, and investment readiness. It includes identifying underutilized sites, promoting adaptive reuse, and supporting initiatives that attract new residents, businesses, and talent. The City's role is to prepare the groundwork, through clear policy direction, proactive partnerships, and infrastructure planning, so that Downtown is positioned to capture future waves of innovation, investment, and community-led activity.

Why is this a priority?

Downtown must be ready to adapt to a rapidly changing economy, climate and urban environment. This priority ensures that policy, land use, and infrastructure decisions today create flexibility for new housing, creative industries, and emerging business opportunities that will sustain the core in the decades ahead.

Examples of scope of action: Adaptive reuse, underground infrastructure renewal, innovation hubs, policy readiness.

4) *Protect the main streets*

Hamilton's main streets, namely King, James, Main, and York, are the backbone of Downtown's identity and economic life. This priority focuses on preserving and strengthening these corridors as vibrant, mixed-use streets that sustain small businesses, cultural venues, and civic activity. It calls for reinvestment in building maintenance, storefront improvements, and the public realm to enhance appearance, accessibility, and walkability. Protecting the main streets also means retaining their authenticity, supporting long-standing businesses and creative entrepreneurs who give Downtown its character. These corridors must remain active, safe, and attractive for people at all times of day and across all seasons.

Why is this a priority?

Hamilton's main streets are the spine of its civic and commercial life but are under visible strain from vacancy and disinvestment. This priority aims to stabilize and renew these corridors through reinvestment, business support, and streetscape improvements that preserve their character and sustain their role as vibrant public places.

Examples of scope of action: Façade renewal, public realm enhancements, storefront activation, heritage preservation.

5) *Support the economic drivers*

Downtown's revitalization depends on its ability to sustain and grow its economic base for the benefit of the city as whole. This priority focuses on reinforcing the sectors and anchors that generate jobs, attract investment, and bring people to the core, including education, healthcare, government, culture, and

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professional services. It seeks to align municipal tools and incentives to retain major employers, support innovation, nurture the next generation of opportunities, and attract new businesses. It recognizes that a strong Downtown economy requires more than office space: it depends on reliable transportation connections, access to services, and a built environment that supports both business operations and the daily needs of employees. Collaboration with institutions and private developers will be critical to strengthening Downtown as a centre of enterprise and opportunity. By supporting its economic drivers, Hamilton ensures that Downtown remains both a regional hub and a generator of citywide prosperity.

Why is this a priority?

Downtown's renewal depends on maintaining a diverse and resilient economic base that can adapt to new patterns of work and mobility. This priority addresses the transportation, service, and infrastructure needs of employers and workers while nurturing opportunity across sectors.

Examples of scope of action: Workforce mobility, business support, incubator environment, infrastructure investment.

6) Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model

Coordinating revitalization requires governance structures that are dedicated, empowered, and accountable. This priority establishes the foundation for a Downtown-focused administrative model that aligns City departments and external partners around shared objectives. It calls for clear leadership, transparent decision-making, dedicated budgets, and mechanisms for ongoing communication with stakeholders. This model will ensure that Downtown receives consistent attention, resources, and follow-through. Effective governance will make revitalization a continuous, coordinated effort, not a one-time initiative.

Why is this a priority?

Effective revitalization requires leadership and accountability focused squarely on Downtown because of its specific circumstances around safety, major city assets, social and economic challenges, development ecosystem, economic value, and impact on the city as a whole. This priority responds to past gaps in coordination and the need for responsiveness by establishing a dedicated structure within the City to align departments, track progress, and sustain collaboration with partners over the long term.

Examples of scope of action: Dedicated office, leadership committee, budgetary priority, progress reporting.

7) Retrofit Downtown

This priority addresses the need to adapt Downtown's physical and economic fabric for a changing future. It focuses on retrofitting buildings, infrastructure, and spaces to support new uses and meet contemporary needs, from office-to-residential conversions and green retrofits to reimagining underused public assets. The goal is to evolve the current physical fabric to make it more permeable between private and public space, enhance the access to green spaces, seamlessly connect the different sections of Downtown, remove obstacles to public and private functions, and capitalize on existing space for more relevant uses for residents, businesses, innovators, and artists. By modernizing what already exists rather than relying solely on new development, Hamilton can retain Downtown's character while preparing it for the next generation of residents, businesses, and experiences.

Why is this a priority?

Much of Downtown's building stock and infrastructure were designed for a different era and need reinvestment to meet contemporary needs. This priority focuses on modernizing existing assets through adaptive reuse, green retrofits, and infrastructure renewal, to support new residents, businesses, and public life while preserving Downtown's character.

Examples of scope of action: Building conversion, reinventing spaces, green retrofit, public space renewal.

6. Actions

6.1. Transformative Initiatives

To translate the Downtown Strategy into visible results, a set of five transformational initiatives illustrate how the City can pursue its priorities through action-driven, high-impact projects. These examples are designed to test, refine, and scale approaches that align municipal effort with private sector partnerships, focusing investments where they can have the greatest effect. Each initiative is conceived as a catalyst for renewal, addressing the key priorities identified in this strategy, from strengthening main streets and improving housing options to enhancing public spaces and enabling economic opportunity. Together, they demonstrate how coordinated, strategic actions can accelerate transformation.

The initiatives include a strategic rent-to-own program, the redevelopment of strategic locations, incentivizing to accelerate transformation, main street lifts, and the creation of new and improved public spaces.

Strategic Rent-to-Own Initiative

This initiative explores the creation of a pathway to ownership for specific sectors by leveraging municipal and private investment. This approach addresses the need for housing affordability and population stability, helping more residents live, stay, invest, and actively shape Downtown.

Levers: Development Environment and Residents, Visitors, and Workers

Priorities: Retrofit Downtown and Enable future opportunities.

Description: The pilot could target two priority sectors: arts and culture professionals and entrepreneurs and STEM graduates, groups whose creativity and enterprise contribute directly to Downtown's renewal. By offering rent-to-own opportunities tied to specific housing and workspace projects, the initiative helps to stabilize the residential base while cultivating a community of creators, innovators, and professionals. It would help free up capital from these groups to invest in their creations and ideas, and have an impact on the city as a whole. This approach supports the rejuvenation of Downtown through artistic expression and business creation, positioning Hamilton as a city that invests in the people who shape its future.

Public investments would be focused on strategic buildings located in areas identified for catalytic impact, properties where the introduction of new residents, studios, or small enterprises can shift perceptions, stimulate foot traffic, and attract complementary private investment. These could include new buildings as well as adaptive reuse of older commercial or civic buildings, located near incubators, educational institutions, or the health sector's emerging employment cluster, ensuring alignment with broader economic development priorities. Examples of locations include on King Street, the former John A. MacDonald secondary school.

The initiative's impact comes from combining targeted public capital with sector-specific recruitment, using housing and workspace as tools to accelerate renewal and attract talent that will help sustain Downtown's transformation over time.

Redevelopment of Strategic Locations

Targeting underutilized or high-visibility properties, including through City intervention, this initiative seeks to demonstrate how redevelopment can act as a catalyst for surrounding investment. These sites are chosen for their ability to signal confidence in Downtown, improve the built environment, and attract complementary private development.

Levers: Development Environment, Economic Opportunities, and Aesthetics and Beautification

Priorities: Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments and Supporting economic drivers

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Description: These sites, such as vacant lots, vacant and outdated commercial blocks, or publicly owned parcels, represent opportunities to showcase what revitalization looks like when public and private investments align. The initiative could identify a City role to intervene and would prioritize projects that blend residential, cultural, and employment uses, ensuring each redevelopment contributes to Downtown's vibrancy and identity. Through design excellence, visible construction activity, and integrated partnerships, it sends a clear message of confidence to residents and investors alike.

The impact of this initiative comes from strategic visibility and momentum. Redeveloping even a few key sites can change the way people perceive the trajectory of Downtown, setting off a cycle of reinvestment. By coupling and coordinating these projects with infrastructure improvements such as streetscape renewal, active transportation links, or nearby public space upgrades, the City ensures that redevelopment generates both economic and community returns. It provides a model for how catalytic redevelopment can unlock wider transformation, accelerating the shift from planning to implementation.

Incentivizing and Supporting to Accelerate Transformation

This initiative focuses on creating or adapting incentive tools and coordinating the impact of multiple stakeholders that accelerate private and not-for-profit sector participation in Downtown renewal. It targets current business operators, developers, investors, social service delivery groups, entrepreneurs, and other shapers of the physical and economic fabric of Downtown. Whether through bylaws, programmes, grants, tax mechanisms, zoning changes, development charge relief, or coordination of delivery of key activities, the goals are to facilitate resource investments, support the core social services, and manage the concentration of services that deliver public value for Downtown and the City as a whole.

Levers: Economic Opportunities, Development Environment, and Public Safety

Priorities: Retrofit Downtown, Enable future opportunities, and Drive transformation through coordinated investment.

Description: Its impact stems from aligning incentives and roles with outcomes. By encouraging the kinds of investments that strengthen Downtown's economic base and social cohesion, the City can accelerate transformation without overextending public resources. The initiative also helps strengthen the presence of the services and infrastructure required to accompany the transformation of Downtown as well address the concentration of certain services that can become obstacles to that transformation. In doing so, it signals that Hamilton is prepared to partner meaningfully with the private and not-for-profit sector to turn potential into financial and social returns for both the partner and the city as a whole.

Main Street Lifts

Designed to rejuvenate Downtown's commercial corridors, Main Street Lifts emphasize storefront improvements, cultural activation, and small business support. By combining streetscape upgrades, marketing initiatives, and targeted incentives, this effort strengthens Downtown's identity and restores confidence in its retail and hospitality economy.

Levers: Main Streets, Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment, and Public and Green Spaces and Assets

Priorities: Protect the main streets, Increase safety and well-being, and Support economic drivers

Description: As construction of the LRT reshapes the urban landscape, this initiative focuses on supporting the hundreds of small businesses directly affected by disruption, helping them remain viable and visible through coordinated marketing, temporary improvements, and access programs. It also positions Downtown as a destination for Hamiltonians — a place where entertainment, food, retail, and services combine to create a vibrant, inclusive, and memorable experience.

Its impact comes from reinforcing the identity and resilience of Downtown's main streets. By combining façade renewal, storefront improvement programs, streetscape enhancements, and cultural activations, Main Street Lifts strengthens the unique character of each corridor while ensuring businesses can thrive during and after major infrastructure projects. A key component includes the temporary redesign of King Street during LRT construction by flipping the front to the back where possible, improving signage and

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pedestrian access, and maintaining continuous business visibility. These actions not only preserve commercial activity but also test new public space configurations.

The initiative also presents an opportunity to redefine Main Street's role within the Downtown network by shifting it from a high-speed transportation corridor to a true urban street that prioritizes people, place, and experience. Through temporary and permanent design interventions, the corridor can be reimaged with wider sidewalks, improved crossings, new landscaping, and active frontages that invite people to linger rather than pass through. This transformation can also enhance connectivity between major civic and cultural landmarks such as City Hall, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, and the FirstOntario Concert Hall, improving the quality, comfort, and safety of public spaces while unlocking new opportunities for cultural programming, tourism, and private reinvestment. It will further strengthen Main Street's relationship with James Street, reinforcing it as a north-south cultural and commercial spine. Together, the two corridors can form a connected and complementary system of activity where Main Street becomes a space for movement, gathering, and commerce, and James Street remains a social and cultural destination that draws people deeper into the Downtown core.

This initiative can also serve as a model for how Hamilton supports local businesses during major city-building projects, demonstrating that economic growth and urban transformation can go hand in hand with community care and continuity.

Creation of Public Spaces

The creation and renewal of public spaces aim to restore Downtown's role as Hamilton's shared civic realm, a place for gathering, creativity, and everyday life. Investments in plazas, green areas, and flexible public venues will improve livability, safety, and accessibility, while fostering a sense of belonging.

Levers: Public and Green Spaces and Assets, Aesthetics and Beautification, and Connectivity and Transportation

Priorities: Retrofit Downtown, Enable future opportunities, Residents, visitors, and workers, and Increasing the sense of safety and well-being.

Description: Downtown Hamilton's most pressing challenges include a lack of true, attractive public spaces that invite people to gather, linger, and connect. While Downtown hosts many civic institutions and key cultural assets, it has relatively few green and open spaces where residents, workers, and visitors can relax, enjoy art, or experience community life. This initiative envisions a renewed network of parks, plazas, and pedestrian spaces that not only provide daily amenity but also express Hamilton's identity, its creativity, inclusiveness, and resilience. These spaces are where public art, performance, markets, and festivals can flourish, turning Downtown into a stage for shared experiences and civic pride.

Its impact lies in creating a true heart for the city, a place that both Hamiltonians and visitors can claim as their own. By strategically investing in the design and programming of public spaces, the City can elevate the Downtown experience, ensuring that green areas, gathering places, and pedestrian corridors are beautiful, safe, and accessible. Examples of locations include the site of the current Frank A. Cooke terminal, the context of Gore Park, the areas surrounding the Art Gallery.

These spaces can also serve as tourism anchors, linking major attractions such as the Art Gallery, FirstOntario Concert Hall, and Gore Park, and drawing people from across the city and beyond. In doing so, this initiative transforms Downtown into a showcase for Hamilton's culture, creativity, and community spirit, a civic environment that embodies the city's past achievements and future ambitions, and that proudly presents Hamilton to the world.

The creation of public spaces amplifies the success of the other transformational initiatives. Great streets and plazas support Main Street Lifts by increasing pedestrian activity and inviting investment in storefronts; they enhance redevelopment projects by improving the context and value of nearby properties; and they provide the settings where arts, culture, and entrepreneurship can thrive. Together, these initiatives form a mutually reinforcing ecosystem where public investment in spaces and

infrastructure unlocks private energy, strengthens social connections, and establishes Downtown as both the heart of Hamilton and the city’s most powerful expression of shared purpose and pride.

6.2.Actions on the Priorities and Initiatives

The Actions represent the most direct and measurable expression of this Downtown Revitalization Strategy, the practical steps that turn priorities and transformational initiatives into reality. Each action is linked to one or more of the identified priorities and transformational initiatives, ensuring that efforts are coordinated, mutually reinforcing, and aimed at delivering tangible outcomes. While priorities define *what must be achieved*, and initiatives show *how change can be catalyzed*, actions define *what will be done*. They identify who leads, what partnerships are required, and what success looks like in the near term.

This draft includes **Action Markers instead of Actions**, as these will be developed in the coming weeks through engagement with the stakeholders. This will allow a more precise and practical definition of actions that build on stakeholder knowledge and needs, making them stronger.

The Strategy emphasizes a one- to five-year timeframe for implementation to generate early momentum, build public confidence, and demonstrate visible progress. Immediate action during this period, especially in the first year, is crucial to show that Downtown Hamilton can move decisively from planning to doing by advancing projects, improving the physical environment, and strengthening civic trust through consistent, transparent delivery. Within this window, actions are designed to be achievable, scalable, and adaptable, ensuring that early wins contribute to long-term transformation. With these priorities and immediate action, significant results can be achievable within that timeframe.

Beyond the five-year horizon, the Strategy recognizes that economic and social conditions will evolve, requiring a reassessment of priorities, resources, and partnerships. New challenges and opportunities, such as demographic shifts, technological change and investment cycles, will inevitably shape Downtown’s trajectory. This plan commits to an adaptive approach, where success is continuously measured, lessons are incorporated, and the next phase of actions builds upon proven results. This ensures that Downtown revitalization remains dynamic, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and aspirations of Hamiltonians.

Action markers	Description/ Intent/ key words	Linked Transformational Initiative	Key Levers	Secondary priority
Increase the sense of safety well-being for all				
MCCRT, COAST, SIT, and RIST resources	Support, resources, and capacity	Main street lifts	Public Safety	Protect the main streets
Cleanliness standards and resources	Performance standards, frequency, scope, and resources	Main street lifts	Aesthetics and Beautification	Protect the main streets
Lighting and nighttime safety in public spaces	Location, type, resources	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Retrofit Downtown
Use of public spaces and their activation	Authorized activities, resources, light infrastructure, urban furniture	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Support the economic drivers

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City employee presence in key tourism locations to guide and welcome visitors	Roles and responsibilities, partnerships, resources	Main street lifts	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all
Community police and bylaw needs of residents and businesses	Type, resources, priorities, enforcement	Main street lifts	Public Safety	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all
Community led initiatives for safety and cleanliness	Type, resources, programme, partnerships	Main street lifts	Public Safety	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all
Monitoring and public reports on improvements	Communication, awareness, and confidence building	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model
Infrastructure and services needs associated with homelessness and mental health support	Current and future services and infrastructure, partnerships	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Enabling future opportunities
Integration of city service delivery	Adaptation and resourcing	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model
Action markers	Description/ Intent/ key words	Linked Transformational Initiative	Key Levers	Secondary priority
Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments				
Coordination of major projects that affect Downtown	Coordination team, resources, strategic approach	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Protect the main streets
Tracking improvements from investments in budgeting exercises	Alignment of investments with priorities	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Development Environment	Protect the main streets

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Alignment and coordination of incentive programs	Streamlining, communication, effectiveness	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Development Environment	Support the economic drivers
Investment relationship between the City and educational and health institutions	Leveraging of investments, impact for community needs and City-wide impact	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Retrofit Downtown
Identification of high impact redevelopment projects with potential partners	Strategic investments, partnerships, decision-making framework	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Retrofit Downtown
Ongoing maintenance funding	Stabilizing resources, stewardship of City assets, partnership	Main street lifts	Aesthetics and Beautification	Protect the main streets
Existing investments capitalization	Strategic framework, leveraging of impacts and potential benefits	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Economic Opportunities	Enabling future opportunities
Service delivery coordination	Resources, streamlining, standards	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Enabling future opportunities
Action markers	Description/ Intent/ key words	Linked Transformational Initiative	Key Levers	Secondary priority
Enabling future opportunities				
Downtown incubator	Current incubators, partnerships, location and spaces, entrepreneurship and startups	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Economic Opportunities	Support the economic drivers
Office conversions	Current programme enhancements, strategic projects, residential and commercial uses	Strategic rent-to-own initiative	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Retrofit Downtown
Future critical infrastructure needs	Improvements to underground infrastructure, obstacles to growth and new infrastructure, climate change adaptation	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Development Environment	Retrofit Downtown

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Resident retention and attraction	Improvements to urban context, well-being and climate change, housing	Strategic rent-to-own initiative	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Retrofit Downtown
Investment for the arts, culture, and entertainment sectors	Infrastructure, programmes, partnerships	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Support the economic drivers
Sustainability and resilience measures in planning	Public and private space integration, climate change adaptation	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments
Bylaws, incentives, and programmes review	Relevance of policies and programmes, alignment with priorities	Main street lifts	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments
Current and future real property needs	Strategic framework for current and future real property needs	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Retrofit Downtown
Current and future transportation and circulation needs and connection with the rest of the City	Parking, new delivery methods, diversity of circulation patterns, integration of Downtown in City, support for other priorities	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Connectivity and Transportation	Retrofit Downtown
Action markers	Description/ Intent/ key words	Linked Transformational Initiative	Key Levers	Secondary priority
Protect the main streets				
Impact of LRT construction on businesses along the corridor	Financial, policy, promotion and structural support	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Support the economic drivers
Temporary redesign of King Street	Roads, bylaws, incentives, urban design	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Support the economic drivers
Façades, signage, and uplift on main streets	Resources, property standards, incentives	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Retrofit Downtown

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Retail retention, attraction and promotion during and after LRT construction	Incentives, zoning, bylaws, communication, programmes, partnerships	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Enabling future opportunities
Main streets activation	Design, activities, permitting, promotion, partnerships	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all
Heritage character and identity of main streets	Guidelines, incentives, programmes, partnerships	Main street lifts	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all
Post-LRT art, beautification, and enhancements of public realm improvements	Design, guidelines, public art, partnerships	Main street lifts	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Retrofit Downtown
Temporary and transitional uses of vacant or underutilized spaces	Policies, bylaws, partnerships	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Enabling future opportunities
Action markers	Description/ Intent/ key words	Linked Transformational Initiative	Key Levers	Secondary priority
Support the economic drivers				
Supporting the City's economic drivers activities Downtown	Policies, land use, incentives, partnerships	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Economic Opportunities	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments
Attracting new businesses and workforce	Promotion, incentives, partnerships	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Economic Opportunities	Enabling future opportunities
Development or rehabilitation of infrastructure in key locations	Strategic actions, partnerships, priority needs	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Economic Opportunities	Enabling future opportunities
Investments in the public realm near significant concentrations of workers	Strategic investments and public realm improvements	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments

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Economic and social relationships between the Arts and Culture, entertainment, and business sectors	Facilitation of relationships for mutual support, events and promotion	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Enabling future opportunities
Downtown as an innovation and investment destination	Promotion, spaces development	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Economic Opportunities	Protect the main streets
Funding of the Arts and Culture sector	Funding, priorities, partnerships	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Retrofit Downtown
Processes and policies for special events Downtown	Permitting, bylaws, process, partnerships, streamlining	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Protect the main streets
Emerging sectors attraction Downtown	Strategic framework, promotion, regulatory environment	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Economic Opportunities	Enabling future opportunities
Target resident and contribution retention and attraction	Strategic promotion, innovative incentives, economic and social impacts	Strategic rent-to-own initiative	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Retrofit Downtown
Culture, arts, entertainment district	Promotion, bylaw, living neighbourhood	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Retrofit Downtown
Action markers	Description/ Intent/ key words	Linked Transformational Initiative	Key Levers	Secondary priority
Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model				
Downtown Office to oversee development, economic, social, funding, programmes, and infrastructure needs	Authorities, resource allocation and reallocation, strategic framework, implementation and operations	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments
Framework for City partnerships	Partnerships, leveraging framework, impacts, strategic direction and implementation	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Development Environment	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments

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Performance metrics for annual reports, plans, and budgets	Integrated planning, impact of investments, strategic planning	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Enabling future opportunities
Public reporting on projects, activities, programs	Communication, promotion, confidence building	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Support the economic drivers
One-stop shop for City services and delivery standards	Streamlining, resident focused approach, standards	Main street lifts	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all
Annual reporting on state of Downtown	Transparency, communication, accountability, strategic framework	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Enabling future opportunities
Action markers	Description/ Intent/ key words	Linked Transformational Initiative	Key Levers	Secondary priority
Retrofit Downtown				
Retrofit programmes	Current programme and enhancements, targeted approach, public and private	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Development Environment	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments
Adaptive reuse of heritage buildings	Current programme enhancements, guidelines, alignment with priority needs in sectors, climate change and sustainability strategies	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Main Streets	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments
Innovative parking strategies	Address changing parking patterns and needs, structures and partnerships	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Connectivity and Transportation	Enabling future opportunities
Neighbourhood sustainability framework	Strategic framework and guidelines for services, assets, and businesses, priorities and capacity	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Development Environment	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments
Public art and area improvements funding	Contribution from public projects, contribution from private projects	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Protect the main streets

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Public realm, streetscaping, public spaces, and green space strategy	consistency of look and feel, quality standards, increase of public spaces, enhancements, adaptation to climate change	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all
Public amenities for residents, businesses, and visitors	Types, design, location	Main street lifts	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all
Public spaces for residents	Alignment with development, redevelopment, availability of public spaces for range of activities	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all
Public spaces associated with major public and private projects	Alignment of strategic investments, development, redevelopment, partnerships	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments
Vacant infrastructure from other levels of government	Reuse and activation, attraction of services and residents, community needs	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments
Development of strategic locations	Community needs, unlocking of social and economic value, uplift effect	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments
Rehabilitation and reuse of transportation related spaces and infrastructure	Transfer to new public uses, priority spaces, visitor and resident needs	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Support the economic drivers

7. Moving Forward

7.1. Leadership

Delivering on the Downtown Hamilton Strategy requires bold, sustained leadership that is civic in scope, collaborative in spirit, and focused on results. The City must take a driving role in coordinating efforts, aligning policies, and investing strategically to demonstrate confidence in the Downtown's future. But true transformation will only be achieved through partnerships that bring together the strengths of the private sector, the not-for-profit community, and the academic and cultural institutions that shape Hamilton's identity. Support and investment from the provincial and federal governments are also essential to realize large-scale projects in housing, infrastructure, and public space renewal. This shared approach to leadership ensures that revitalization is not only well-managed, but also deeply inclusive. It should be built on cooperation, trust, and a shared belief in Downtown Hamilton as the civic heart of the city's next chapter.

Effective leadership in this context means moving from management to direction, where the City serves as the orchestrator of coordinated action rather than a passive administrator of projects. It requires clear decision-making authority, alignment of departmental mandates, and an ability to act quickly and flexibly in partnership with others. Leadership also demands accountability through the transparent measurement of outcomes, continuous communication with the public, and a commitment to learning from both successes and setbacks. By institutionalizing collaboration and maintaining a consistent focus on outcomes, Hamilton can turn vision into action and establish Downtown revitalization as a model for how cities lead systemic, long-term change.

Moving the Strategy forward also requires a culture change within the City itself, one that recognizes Downtown's distinct needs and complexities and adapts to meet them. Revitalizing the core is not business as usual: it demands integrated thinking across departments, openness to experimentation, and a willingness to take calculated risks. City staff and leadership must share an understanding of Downtown as a complex ecosystem, where social, economic, and physical factors intersect and where timing, collaboration, and coordination are everything. Building this internal culture that is proactive, responsive, and empowered, is essential to sustaining momentum and achieving the full promise of a revitalized Downtown Hamilton.

The Role of the Province

The Province of Ontario has a critical role to play in the revitalization of Downtown Hamilton, both as a partner in investment and as a steward of the legislative and policy frameworks that shape how cities grow, house people, and create opportunity. The transformation of Hamilton's core aligns directly with provincial objectives for economic development, housing delivery, infrastructure optimization, and community well-being. A strong, prosperous Downtown contributes to regional competitiveness, attracts talent, supports innovation, and reduces infrastructure costs by maximizing existing urban assets.

To move the Strategy forward, the City should work with the Province on shared priorities and measurable outcomes. Key opportunities for collaboration include:

- Housing and adaptive reuse: partnering on funding tools and regulatory flexibility to enable the conversion of underused commercial spaces into new homes, particularly through the *Strategic Rent-to-Own Initiative* and the *Retrofit Downtown* program.
- Infrastructure and transit alignment: ensuring that *Main Street Lifts* and public realm improvements are coordinated with LRT construction and provincial transit investments to minimize disruption and maximize long-term benefits.
- Economic development and innovation: leveraging the Province's programs in entrepreneurship, post-secondary collaboration, and health innovation to strengthen Downtown's role as a centre for research, culture, and business growth.

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- Public safety and community well-being: partnering on integrated responses to homelessness, mental health, and addiction, ensuring provincial health and housing systems work in concert with municipal service delivery and strengthening the funding sources for the integrated units.
- Cultural and tourism investment: supporting arts, heritage, and public space renewal projects that position Downtown Hamilton as a cultural destination for Ontario and beyond.

The Role of the Federal Government

The Government of Canada is a crucial partner in the revitalization of Downtown Hamilton, particularly in advancing the national priorities of housing affordability, climate action, inclusive economic growth, and infrastructure renewal. Federal policies and programs can directly enable the City's objectives by providing the financial tools, regulatory flexibility, and long-term support necessary to implement complex, integrated urban transformations.

Downtown Hamilton embodies the challenges and opportunities faced by many Canadian cities including aging infrastructure, housing pressures, economic transition, and the need to build resilience in the face of climate and social change. Investing here is therefore both a local and national opportunity: a demonstration of how federal urban policy can help reimagine the heart of a mid-sized city.

The City could seek the support of the federal government that builds on existing programs while advocating for tailored solutions. Priority areas for partnership include:

- Housing and affordability: leveraging programs under the *National Housing Strategy* and *Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation* (CMHC) to accelerate housing delivery through adaptive reuse, affordable rent-to-own models, and mixed-income developments.
- Infrastructure and public realm renewal: securing federal funding for sustainable transportation, energy efficiency, green stormwater systems, and climate-resilient infrastructure through programs such as the *Green and Inclusive Community Buildings Fund* and *Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program*.
- Cultural and heritage investments: aligning with federal priorities for cultural tourism, and creative sector development to strengthen Downtown Hamilton as a cultural and economic hub.
- Inclusive economic growth: partnering with federal economic agencies and innovation programs to attract investment in clean technology, creative industries, and health innovation sectors anchored in the Downtown core.
- Social and community resilience: coordinating with federal agencies to support community safety, mental health, and newcomer integration programs that foster inclusion and well-being in the urban core.

The Role of the Private and Not-for-Profit Sectors

The private and not-for-profit sectors are indispensable partners in achieving the revitalization of Downtown Hamilton. While the City provides leadership, coordination, and vision, it is the creativity, capital, and commitment of these sectors that turn plans into tangible outcomes. Downtown renewal depends on shared ownership of the city's future where businesses, developers, community organizations, and institutions act not only in their own interests, but as contributors to a collective urban transformation. These sectors bring agility, innovation, and the ability to test new approaches that complement the City's long-term planning and investment.

For the private sector, the opportunity lies in strategic co-investment and place-based innovation. Developers, property owners, and investors can align with City priorities by focusing on projects that deliver multiple benefits, such as housing, employment, and public realm improvements, while advancing environmental and social outcomes. BIAs, small enterprises, and major employers can help animate Downtown streets, provide essential services, and shape a vibrant local economy. Collaboration can take many forms: public-private partnerships for redevelopment and infrastructure, participation in the *Main Street Lifts* initiative to strengthen business resilience, or private sponsorships that enhance public spaces and cultural programming. The City's role is to create a stable, predictable, and responsive environment that gives the private sector confidence to invest, innovate, and stay committed to Downtown Hamilton's long-term success.

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For the not-for-profit sector, leadership means championing community, culture, and inclusion. Hamilton’s social service organizations, housing providers, arts institutions, and community groups are already embedded in the fabric of the Downtown. Their knowledge and networks are vital for addressing complex issues, from homelessness and mental health to cultural participation and social equity. The City can strengthen collaboration by supporting long-term operating partnerships, shared facilities, and co-designed programs that leverage local expertise. The *Strategic Rent-to-Own Initiative*, for example, offers opportunities for community-based organizations to provide affordable, creative live-work solutions; similarly, cultural and social organizations can activate public spaces through inclusive programming that builds pride and connection.

Together, the private and not-for-profit sectors bring balance and sustainability to Downtown renewal. Private capital accelerates growth and redevelopment, while the not-for-profit community ensures that revitalization remains equitable and grounded in local needs. By fostering ongoing dialogue through structures such as a *Downtown Partnership Council* and creating mechanisms for co-investment and shared outcomes, Hamilton can harness the strengths of both sectors. In doing so, the City will build not only new buildings and businesses, but also trust, collaboration, and a resilient civic ecosystem.

Partner	Primary role	Key responsibilities	Strategic Opportunities
City of Hamilton	Lead and coordinate the overall Downtown Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drive implementation through a dedicated Downtown Office and governance framework - Align departmental mandates, budgets, and policies - Foster a culture of collaboration, flexibility, and responsiveness - Measure progress and communicate results transparently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish cross-departmental project teams - Integrate Downtown outcomes into corporate performance plans such as a state of Downtown report - Act as catalyst for partnerships and funding alignment
Provincial government	Policy and investment partner enabling transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Align provincial infrastructure, housing, and economic programs with Downtown objectives - Co-invest in major projects that deliver regional benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner on housing conversions, LRT coordination, and infrastructure upgrades - Collaborate on economic development and workforce initiatives
Federal government	National partner advancing housing, climate, and inclusive growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide capital and funding for housing, green infrastructure, and cultural projects - Align federal economic and social programs with local priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access <i>National Housing Strategy</i> and <i>Green and Inclusive Buildings Fund</i> - Co-invest in cultural and public realm renewal

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Partner	Primary role	Key responsibilities	Strategic Opportunities
Private sector	Co-investor and driver of economic vitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliver development, investment, and business activity aligned with Strategy priorities - Participate in coordinated infrastructure, housing, and streetscape projects - Support Downtown vitality through business innovation and property reinvestment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborate through public–private partnerships and BIAs - Contribute to <i>Main Street Lifts</i> and <i>Redevelopment Initiatives</i> - Sponsor cultural and public space improvements
Not-for-profit sector	Champion of community, culture, and social equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide social, cultural, and housing services that strengthen Downtown’s livability - Engage marginalized and creative communities in co-designing spaces and programs - Support inclusion, well-being, and civic participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner in the <i>Strategic Rent-to-Own Initiative</i> and public space activations - Operate shared community or cultural facilities - Participate in a <i>Downtown Partnership Council</i> to inform implementation

7.2.Measuring Outcomes

Revitalizing Downtown Hamilton requires not just action, but accountability and learning. Measuring outcomes ensures that investments, financial, human, and political, translate into real improvements in how people experience the Downtown. Tracking outcomes builds trust, guides course correction, and demonstrates progress toward the shared vision of a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient core. To be effective, measurement must go beyond counting projects or dollars spent; it must assess changes in conditions, such as safety, vitality, economic resilience, and civic pride. Outcome measurement is therefore not a final step but an integral part of implementation.

The City should adopt a results-based framework that links each priority to a set of quantifiable and qualitative indicators, tracked regularly and reported publicly. These indicators should combine data from multiple sources, including municipal records, business and community surveys, social statistics, and spatial analysis, to reflect both performance and perception. Progress can then be summarized annually through a Downtown Dashboard or State of the Downtown Report, allowing decision-makers and partners to see what’s working, where challenges remain, and how resources should be adjusted.

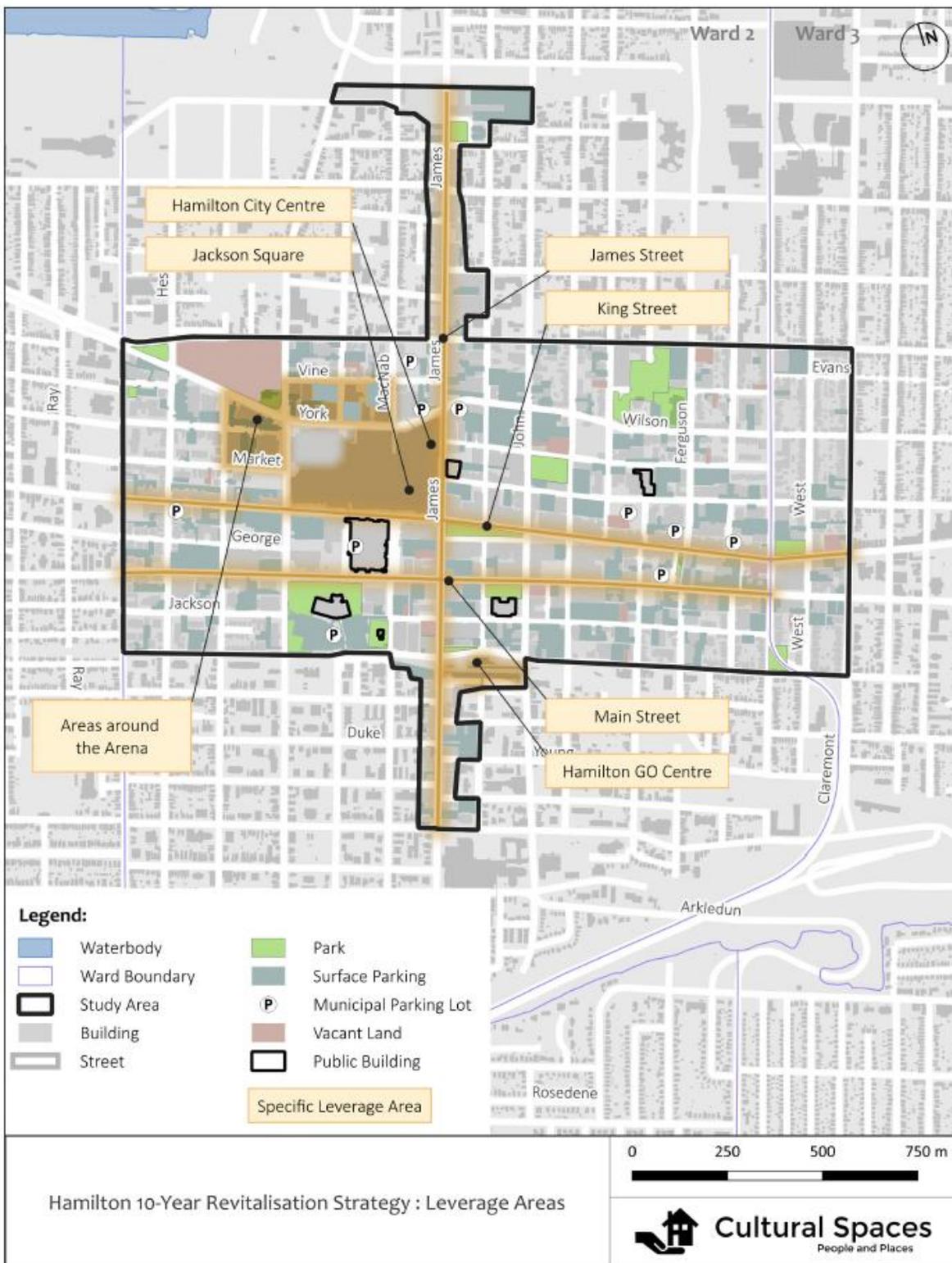
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Examples of Outcome Measurement Framework		
Priority	Indicator	Measurement tools
1. Increase the Sense of Safety and Well-Being for All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction in crime and calls for service - Increased perception of safety (survey data) - Greater use of public spaces at all hours 	Police and community safety data, citizen surveys, pedestrian counts, business feedback
2. Driving Transformation through Shared and Coordinated Investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ratio of private to public investment - Alignment of capital projects across partners - Number of coordinated redevelopment or co-investment projects 	City capital plan, development permits, investment database, partnership agreements
3. Enabling Future Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growth in new businesses and start-ups - Uptake of innovation or cultural spaces - Increase in adaptive reuse projects 	Business licensing data, development approvals, economic development reports
4. Protect the Main Streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change in storefront vacancy rate - Business retention and survival rates - Pedestrian activity along key corridors 	Vacancy audits, BIA data, foot traffic counters
5. Support the Economic Drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job creation and retention in key sectors - Increased Downtown employment density - Commercial and institutional space occupancy 	Labour force statistics, commercial property reports, institutional surveys
6. Set up a Downtown Focused Governance and Administrative Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of Downtown Office and governance structures - Frequency of cross-departmental coordination meetings - Public reporting and transparency measures implemented 	Internal City reporting, governance framework reviews, annual Council reports
7. Retrofit Downtown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of retrofitted or repurposed buildings - Energy efficiency gains and GHG reductions - Increased residential units through adaptive reuse 	Building permit data, energy audits, CMHC and planning records

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Appendices

Appendix A: Leverage Areas Map



Appendix B: Sources

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